

# **REMARKS AT THE DEMOCRACY VIDEO CHALLENGE - JAZZ RECEPTION**

**Ambassador Lee Feinstein**

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**The Embassy Residence**

Good evening everybody and welcome. As you can already see, this is not your typical diplomatic reception. Tonight we gather to pay tribute to two quintessential hallmarks of American life: Jazz and democracy. The close link between these two phenomena was not always appreciated, especially in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And yet, music historians today describe Jazz as the democratization of music.

The rise of Jazz in the 1900s challenged earlier distinctions between high-culture and popular music, making it possible for Americans of all social classes, often with little formal training, to produce music for mass consumption.

One of New Orleans' favorite sons, the great jazz musician Wynton Marsalis, may have put it best when he said "Jazz is democracy in action." I don't have to explain this to Poles, who valued Jazz as a form of cultural expression – and also employed it to express political opposition – during the darkest years of communist rule.

I am reminded of the story of Willis Conover's visit to Warsaw in the 1950s. Conover was the renowned host of the "Music USA" program on Voice of America who once said that jazz is the "music of freedom." During the 60's and 70's, listening to VOA was forbidden in Poland. The government thought jazz was dangerous and subversive, but the audiences loved it. When Conover arrived in Poland in 1959, people gathered at the airport with cameras and flowers. He thought they were waiting for a famous person to arrive, but then saw a large sign that said, "Welcome to Poland, Mr. Conover." The crowds were there to see him.

In many ways, the Internet plays a similar role in today's world. It has expanded access, amplified the voices of marginalized groups, and increased opportunities for participation in political life. Tonight we are honoring the Polish entrants in the Democracy Video Challenge and Photo Competition, nine of whom are here with us tonight. The Democracy Video Challenge is a worldwide competition, now in its second year, run by the U.S. Department of State. It challenges young people to answer the question, "Democracy is...." in a short video.

For the second year in a row, there were more entries from Poland than from any other European country. It has been 20 years since the fall of Communism in Poland, and the democratic experience is still fresh. Even younger Poles – today's Internauts -- remember the sacrifices of their parents and grandparents. They understand that those of us who enjoy the blessings of liberty have a civic duty to take part in political life, to defend democratic values, and to support those around the world who aspire to democratic change.

As Secretary Clinton said last year when awarding the worldwide winners of the Challenge, "This video challenge reminds us that young people will always find new and creative ways to participate in and further democracy. We think that this next generation of young people who are more connected, more able to communicate across oceans and boundaries, will give new meaning and purpose to democracy. That is our hope."

Three semi-finalists from Poland will continue on to the Europe-wide competition. Tonight we will be screening the nine Polish video entries, and each of you will have the opportunity to cast a vote for your favorite. The films were judged last week by an esteemed panel of seven jurors, whose votes have already been tallied. The third finalist will be selected tonight through your votes, and our finalists will be announced later this evening.

We will be treated to a performance this evening by two accomplished Jazz artists from the Berklee College of Music in Boston. Guitarist John Wilkins and percussionist Victor Mendoza are visiting Poland to meet music students and faculty for workshops and concerts in Katowice, Krakow, and Warsaw. Joining them will be the famous Polish musician and Berklee alumnus, Piotr Rodowicz. Piotr is one of the founders of the Jazz Department at the Warsaw Music College, a longtime partner of the Embassy in bringing American jazz musicians to Polish music students. We are thrilled to have them with us tonight.

I hope you will all enjoy this evening's events. The Polish entries in the Democracy Video Challenge will be screened throughout the evening in the parlor room behind me, where you will each receive a ballot to vote for your favorite. The top 10 photos in the Democracy Photo Competition are on display in the dining room, so please take a moment to view them as well. Around 7:30, we will begin the jazz concert and after the concert, we will announce the three semi-finalists, who will go on to the regional competition.

Thank you all for joining us this evening. Please enjoy yourselves. And let's begin the screenings.